
Maura J. Rossman, M.D., Health Officer

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Dear Community,

This afternoon the CDC released a new framework to monitor the level of COVID-19 in communities that includes hospitalizations, hospital capacity and cases. This new approach focuses on preventing hospitals and the healthcare system from being overwhelmed and directing prevention efforts toward protecting people at high risk for severe illness. Rather than focusing on eliminating all virus transmission, CDC will recommend prevention measures, such as masks, when the level of severe disease in communities has the potential to overwhelm the healthcare system. These prevention measures can reduce that strain and avoid crisis.

Going forward, recommendations will be based on the level of COVID-19 in a community and the strain on healthcare;

- When communities are at a **“low”** level: Things are looking pretty good. In this circumstance, masks are not needed in most settings.
- When communities are at a **“medium”** level: Hospitals are seeing more sick patients and there is likely more disease in the community. The focus is on protecting the people who are most likely to get severely ill and die from COVID-19. In this circumstance, masks are optional. Persons at high-risk, or whom interact with someone who is immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, may choose to wear well-fitting masks indoors in public.
- When communities are at a **“high”** level: There is potential the healthcare system could soon become strained. In this case, universal indoor masking is recommended, including schools and workplaces.
- **Importantly, people may choose to mask at any time.**

Today, Howard County is designated as a community with a low level of transmission, https://bit.ly/community_levels. Masking is not needed in most settings, but individuals may opt to wear a mask at any time. Everyone should stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines and get tested if you have symptoms.

Thank you for doing your part to help us control the spread of COVID-19. Go to howardcountymd.gov/health/covid-19 for information on testing, masks and vaccine sites. Please remember:

- **Get vaccinated** as soon as you can and get a **Booster** when eligible.
- **Mask** if you are sick or at the recommendation of your healthcare provider.
- **Stay home** if you are not feeling well.
- **Test** if you have been exposed or have symptoms.
- **Isolate** if you test positive.
- **Quarantine** if you are identified as a close contact [following CDC guidelines](#).

Sincerely,



Maura J. Rossman, MD